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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LJUBLJANA 000537

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EUN](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [MARR](#) [HR](#) [SI](#)
SUBJECT: NEW SLOVENIAN FM IS "PRO-AMERICA," BUT GIVES
LITTLE GROUND ON CROATIA

REF: LJUBLJANA 459

Classified By: Amb. Yousif B. Ghafari, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

Summary -----

11. (C) In a December 4 meeting with the Ambassador, new Foreign Minister Samuel Zbogar stressed that he was pro-American and that Slovenia wanted to continue to deepen its transatlantic ties. He confirmed that Slovenia would withdraw its two instructors from Iraq, either at the end of December or the end of February. Recognizing that Afghanistan would be important to the incoming administration, he reassured the Ambassador that Slovenia would not decrease its troop presence there; after evaluating its contribution, Slovenia could possibly increase its troops or change their mission. Zbogar said the government had unanimously approved the ratification of NATO accession protocols for Croatia and Albania and predicted that parliamentary ratification early next year would not be a problem. He explained that Slovenia would not stand in the way of opening new chapters for Croatia's EU accession negotiations as long as the negotiations did not in any way prejudice the border dispute. While Slovenia does not want to be isolated on the issue of Croatia's accession negotiations, the government needs to be able to say unequivocally that it did not allow the accession process to prejudice the outcome of its border dispute with Croatia. End Summary.

Continuing Strong U.S.- Slovenia Relationship -----

12. (C) During their first official meeting, Foreign Minister (and former Ambassador to the U.S.) Zbogar commented that Ambassador Ghafari was the first Ambassador he was receiving because he was "pro-American." The FM assured the Ambassador that, as PM Pahor had said (reftel), Slovenia's foreign policy priorities would not change. Slovenia wanted to continue to deepen its transatlantic ties. Zbogar stressed that it was very important to work closely together, within the context of the EU, NATO and bilaterally. He expressed regret that Slovenia probably would not have an Ambassador in the U.S. until March or April. He hoped that Slovenia would be able to send Washington a nominee for agreement by mid-January.

Commitment to NATO Missions -----

13. (C) The Foreign Minister explained that the new government's coalition agreement called for the withdrawal of Slovenia's two instructors from NTM-I. He said that he had informed NATO SYG de Hoop Scheffer that Slovenia would be

leaving Iraq, although there was not yet a concrete date. Slovenia would withdraw its two soldiers either at the end of the year when the current UN mandate expired or at the end of February, when the troops' deployment is set to end. Zbogar reassured us, however, that Slovenia had no intention of lowering its troop contribution to Afghanistan, and might even increase it. Slovenia planned to evaluate its participation to see where it could be "the most useful for the alliance." He mentioned that Slovenia was considering an OMLT. He acknowledged that he expected the incoming U.S. administration to stress Afghanistan and he opined that it was easy for the GoS to defend its involvement in Afghanistan with the Slovenian public. He added that he and Defense Minister Jelusic planned to discuss these issues in the near future.

Relations with Croatia

14. (C) Zbogar informed the Ambassador that the government had approved the draft law on the ratification of NATO accession protocols for Croatia and Albania and would send it to Parliament. If Parliament held an extraordinary session in December, it would consider ratification then; otherwise it would be January. Although Parliament needed a two-thirds majority for ratification, Zbogar did not expect it to be a problem, even if it could become sensitive because of ongoing negotiations with Croatia. In a separate December 4 meeting, the Chairman of Parliament's Committee on Foreign Policy, Ivo Vajgl, assured the DCM that it "would be no problem to get 60 votes for Croatia's NATO accession." PM Pahor told the press December 4 that the government's move was not related to

LJUBLJANA 00000537 002 OF 002

talks with Croatia regarding its EU accession.

15. (C) In discussing negotiations regarding Croatia's EU accession, Zbogar explained the new government's efforts to find a face-saving solution that preserved Slovenia's national interests. According to Zbogar, the documents that Croatia had sent to the EU to start negotiations on six new chapters contained references and drawings that prejudge the disputed border. Slovenia had not agreed to opening those chapters because it might imply tacit acceptance of the Croatian position. When Slovenia first asked Croatia to remove the references, the European Commission dismissed Slovenia's concerns as "far-fetched." When it became clear that Slovenia would not back down, the French EU Presidency drafted a letter essentially stating that nothing in the negotiations could be taken as prejudging the outcome of the border dispute. According to Zbogar, Slovenia proposed what it thought would be acceptable changes to that letter; however, the French Presidency came back with another draft that did not reflect Slovenia's concerns. The FM stressed that accepting the Croatian negotiating documents as is would jeopardize Slovenia's position on an issue of vital national interest. Zbogar commented that the government had to be able to convince its public that it had protected Slovenian interests. He noted that PM Pahor had said clearly that, if forced to do so, Slovenia would choose its national interest over Europe's.

16. (C) Zbogar acknowledged that the EU needed Slovenia's agreement by the December 19 enlargement conference in order for the EU to be able to stick to its "ambitious" schedule of Croatia closing all negotiating chapters by the end of 2009. He added that the EU wanted to show enlargement was alive, especially since the French Presidency had not done much on Turkey. Pahor said his first meeting with his Croatian counterpart in Brussels earlier in the week had gone well - they had agreed to intensify communications and work on joint initiatives. He added, however, that that meeting had occurred before Slovenia's changes to the French letter were rejected.

Comment

17. (C) Zbogar made it clear with both his words and his body language that Slovenia wants to deepen its relationship with the U.S. Zbogar treated the meeting as one between old friends. We believe Slovenia could be convinced to deepen its involvement in Afghanistan. We should focus on Afghanistan rather than fight a battle we will not win over keeping two Slovene instructors in Iraq. The newly-elected government feels it must keep its promise to the electorate about withdrawing its instructors. Regarding Croatia, Slovenia is clearly worried that it could find itself isolated in the position of blocking progress on Croatia's negotiations with the EU. That said, Zbogar emphasized that Slovenia would choose isolation within the EU over the perception that it had sold out the national interest. A face-saving solution based on the French Presidency's proposal seems to us to be the best way forward; the details, however, will have to be worked out among the parties.
GHAFARI